



Sociology and Traction, City's New Rapid Transit Problem

President of the Interborough Shows Relation Between Growth of Population and the Increase of Transportation Facilities

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THE local transit problem of the past has been largely an engineering problem.

The problem of the future is newer and bigger. It is a sociological problem, the problem growing out of increasing congestion due to the rapid growth of population.

New York in its dual subway contracts has already taken the lead in studying this aspect of things. But it has only begun. Not only is the problem big, it is immediate and pressing. It is a portentous fact that no increase of transit facilities, no matter how great, has ever permanently relieved congestion. Congestion, in fact, has increased.

Every Engineering Task Done.

Our experience in New York, not only in the first subway but in that vast network of lines known as the dual system, has met and conquered nearly every conceivable problem of a purely engineering sort. The dual system represents in addition an effort to meet problems that are sociological in nature; and to meet sociological demands it necessarily comprises a financial scheme wholly new in the history of urban transit work in America.

The dual system is so called because two large companies, the Interborough Rapid Transit and the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, were enlisted with the city itself as part owner and sharer of profits. The dual system will when completed comprise more than 600 miles of line.

The first subway consists of about seventy-three miles of track. The dual system will include not only the first subway but all the subways and elevated lines in all the city's boroughs. It will comprise about 618 miles of track. It should be in full operation next year.

The Interborough Rapid Transit Company will operate 358 miles and the New York Municipal Railway Corporation (Brooklyn Rapid Transit) will operate 260 miles.

To Treble Transit Facilities.

The dual system will not only more than double the elevated and subway mileage existing before the new contracts were undertaken, but it will increase transportation facilities more than three-fold. It is the greatest engineering project of the kind ever undertaken and will have cost upward of \$400,000,000, or more than the Panama Canal.

It will be able to carry more than three billion passengers a year. While it does not comprise the McAdoo tubes nor the Pennsylvania tunnel to New Jersey, it will furnish outlets for those lines. Richmond Borough (Staten Island) will be the only borough not immediately furnished with new subways or elevated lines, but a tunnel under the



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Narrows to the island from South Brooklyn is in the plans and eventually will be built. The riders on the municipal ferries from Staten Island will transfer without extra fare to the New York railway surface lines in Manhattan.

In time the dual system will revert completely to city ownership.

With this brief word as to its purely physical aspects, let us glance at the sociological and financial sides, for they are intimately related.

Municipal Ownership Idea.

Years ago, in 1894, to be exact, the people by referendum vote decided in favor of a policy of municipalization of its rapid transit system. The old Rapid Transit Commission and its successor, the Public Service Commission, ever since the appointment of the latter body in 1907, have been working out that policy of municipal partnership. I need not go into the many problems that had to be met. But that the situation may be understood I must consider for a moment some aspects of the relationship of transit companies and municipalities as a broad topic.

In the beginning of modern street transit facilities came the horse car. The lines were short, cars were inexpensive, labor was cheap and fares were universally five cents. The horse car lines were almost invariably profitable.

Hardly any business has been so rapid in its evolution as the street railway business. Cable cars were rapidly succeeded by overhead and under-

What Is in Store for the Travelling Public of New York in the Future—An Old Question Treated in a Different Way

ground electric trolley cars, elevated lines and subways.

When invention really laid hold of it improvements in the transportation field came so thick and fast that long before new cars, new electric apparatus, new power houses, &c., were worn out they were out of style and obsolete. In Denver, for instance, a complete cable car system was scrapped and electric lines put in its place before the cable lines were a year old.

An era of franchise restrictions set in. Franchises were limited in duration. Franchise taxes were levied, as were car licenses, paving taxes, snow removal charges, percentages of gross receipts, free transfers and the like. All, of course, had to come out of the fare payers.

Few Electric Companies Pay.

Of late years, particularly since the opening of the war, the rising costs of taxation, labor and materials have been so rapid, so huge that the electric railway company that is paying nowadays is the rare exception. In all New York State not one-half the companies are able to meet their fixed charges. Some are not even earning their operating expenses. Few are paying any dividends whatever and none as much as the law entitles public utilities to as the legal "fair return." They are carrying more passengers, but are making less money.

It is the same all over the country. The secret of it all is this and nothing more: Fixed fare and rising costs.

So everywhere the companies are looking for greater income or reduction of taxes. They must have these things or go into bankruptcy. Several companies have junked their lines and quit business. Never but once has the mileage of electric railways going into receivership been so great as in 1917.

It was one thing to carry a horse car passenger a couple of miles for five cents. It is quite another, either on longer lines or by use of transfers, to carry a passenger five, ten or fifteen miles for five cents. Yet that's what the growth of cities makes necessary. Nothing has developed our municipalities more than their street cars.

Advantages of Suburban Life.

It is desirable that the workingman and all others be able to go away from the busy centres of industry to more wholesome home surroundings in the outlying districts. There children can have more favorable surroundings and family life in something like its true American form. Again, the development of the outlying districts raises values in a way that gives the city higher income from taxation. These are important sociological reasons behind the dual system.

No matter under what system a transit line be
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